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Hermon House Tract No. 3

A CHALLENGE TO EVERY JEW

By

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by

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1. Should Experience Be Shared?
2. Can We Believe the Hebrew Prophets?
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Foreword

By W. Bell Dawson, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S.C.
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We would commend the careful consideration of this "*Challenge*" to everyone who is truly desirous to arrive at the truth in regard to the most serious and important of all subjects, which is here dealt with. By being instructed in science, we could add nothing to the scholarship we find here, by commending it; but scientific training gives competence in following logical reasoning, and to this we can give our endorsement. For this short pamphlet places in a clear light the greatest moral problem in the universe, namely, how it is that God, when He is just and righteous, can acquit the sinner; and an answer is found by seeking the true meaning of the Scriptures.

There are many who make it their boast that they are Rationalists, and will not accept anything "contrary to reason". *They turn from religion, because they think that it requires them to accept much on faith which is not reasonable.* But when we turn to the great central question which is here discussed, can we suppose that the Judge of all the Earth would do anything irrational? Where then is a solution to be found which does not subvert the attributes of God? For He cannot set aside His justice so that in His mercy He may pass

over our wrong-doing. How we are to be forgiven, we can only hope to know, therefore, by carefully considering what the Lord God has Himself revealed to us, for He only can find the wondrous Way. All the philosophies of men to account for sin and evil, and their devices in dealing with it, lead to impossibilities or in the end subvert morality itself. *It is the human way which is irrational.* But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.

Let us therefore look into the Scriptures, to see the way in which the Lord has guided the Hebrew people of old, by the object-lessons of the sacrifices, and by the teaching of prophets, to prepare their minds to understand His way of atonement for sin, thus showing the need for an actual fulfillment as the highest work of the Messiah. It is this which is set forth and explained from the Scriptures in the discussion before us. As it is a matter which vitally concerns us all, may it be read with an honest and true heart, and the desire to perceive the truth.

Montreal, Canada
November 16, 1933

A Challenge to Every Jew

To what authority should a Jew, loyal to the traditions of his race, turn for spiritual light and guidance? The answer must surely be: "To the Hebrew Scriptures". Does any true Jew wish to admit there are portions of the Old Testament he dare not study? An essential qualification of any student examining evidence is an open and an honest mind. Will any right-minded Jew quail before a fair invitation to face his own Scriptures?

The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah presents in words of epic simplicity and majesty a picture of the suffering Servant of the Lord, which is a challenge to every thinking Jew.

liii. 13 "Behold, my servant shall prosper,
He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.

14 As many were appalled at thee,—
So marred was his visage beyond the semblance of man,
And his form unlike that of the sons of men,—

15 So shall he startle many nations;
Because of him kings shall shut their mouths,
For that which had not been told them, shall they see,
And that which they had not heard, shall they perceive."

liii. 1 "Who could have believed our message,
And the arm of the Lord, to whom hath it been revealed?

2 For he grew up before Him as a young plant,
And as a root out of a dry ground;
He had neither form nor majesty, that we should look upon him,
Nor beauty that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, [1]
And as one from whom men hide their faces
He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 But indeed our griefs hath he borne,
And our sorrows,—he carried them;
Yet we thought him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced because of our transgressions,
He was crushed because of our iniquities;
The chastisement that brought us peace was upon him,
And with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep had gone astray,
We had turned each to his own way,
And the Lord hath made to meet upon him
The iniquity of us all.

7 He was treated with rigor, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth;
As a sheep that to the slaughter is led,

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[1] The Hebrew word "choli" literally means sickness, but it may designate suffering in general. See: Buhl, F., *Wilhelm Gesenius' Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, p. 233.

König, Eduard, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, p. 109.

And as a ewe before her shearers is dumb,
So he opened not his mouth.

8 From prison [2] and from judgment he was snatched away,
And as regards his generation, who is concerned?
For he was cut off out of the land of the living;
Because of the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9 And they made his grave with the wicked,
Yet with a rich man was he in his death,
Although he had done no violence,
Neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him:
He hath put him to grief;
When his life shall make a trespass-offering,
He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days,
And the purpose of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

11 Of the travail of his soul he shall see,
And shall be satisfied;
By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many,
And their iniquities he shall bear.

12 Therefore will I give him a portion among the great,
And with the mighty he shall divide the spoil,
Because he poured out his soul unto death,
And was numbered with the transgressors,
And he bare the sin of many,
And maketh intercession for the transgressors." [3]

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[2] Or "coercion".

[3] The passage is given in the writer's translation.

A challenging question at once presents itself: "Who is the Servant?" This can best be determined by considering the interpretation of the old synagogue, and above all, by a careful analysis of the text itself in the light of the Old Testament as a whole.

It is important first of all to ascertain whether the Jews at any time had a doctrine of a suffering Messiah. There is considerable evidence for an affirmative answer not only in the remaining books of the Old Testament, but in rabbinical literature, and even in the prayers of the synagogue. August Wünsche has made a laborious compilation of extracts from old rabbinical writings, from which he draws the following conclusion:

> "The old synagogue, holding the tradition of the fathers and not yet having entered into a doctrinal polemic with the Christian church, always applied the chapter to the Messiah." [4]

Targum Jonathan (220) and Midrash Tanchuma (380) interpret the Servant to mean the Messiah. The Homily 37 of a Midrash states that in the Messianic age the patriarchs will say to the Messiah:

> "Ephraim, Messiah our righteousness, although we are thy forefathers, thou art greater than we, because thou hast borne the iniquities of our children, and there have passed over thee hardships such as have not passed upon men of earlier or of later times, and thou wast an object of derision and contumely to the nations of the world for Israel's sake." [5]

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[4] *Die Leiden des Messias*, p. 40.

[5] *Pesikta Rabbati* xxxvii, ed. Friedman, f. 161 b-162 a, quoted in full in *Yalqut* on Isaiah lx. (§499).

The Musaph service for the Day of Atonement contains a remarkable prayer: [6]

> "Messiah, our righteousness, hath departed from us; horror hath seized upon us; and we have none to justify us! He hath borne the yoke of our iniquities and our transgressions, and is wounded because of our transgressions. He beareth the burden of our sins on His shoulder that He may find pardon for our iniquities. We are healed by His wounds. O Eternal One, it is time that Thou shouldest create Him anew! Oh bring Him up from the terrestrial sphere, raise Him up from the land of Seir, [7] to announce salvation to us from Mount Lebanon, [8] a second time by the hand of Yinnon." [9]

In their controversy with the Christian church, the two illustrious scholars, Rabbi Sh'lomoh Yizchaki (1040-1105), better known as Rashi from his initials, and Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235) interpreted the passage as referring to Israel, but their view was rejected as unsatisfactory by so great a scholar as Rabbi Mosheh ben Maimon (1135-1204), popularly known as Maimonides, or, again from his initials, as Rambam, whose opinion finds justification in the Jewish liturgy, bearing the authority of the synagogue.

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[6] Levy, David, *Prayers for the Day of Atonement*, p. 38.

[7] Seir represents Edom, which in the Talmud is a synonym for Rome, where according to Hebrew tradition the Messiah undergoes humiliation and suffering.

[8] Lebanon symbolizes the Mount of the Temple, where the Messiah is to appear.

[9] Yinnon is a Talmudic term for the Messiah in His pre-existent life, as in Ps. lxxii. 17, which the Talmud renders: "Before the sun (was created), Yinnon was His name" (*Bab. Sanhedr.* in 98b).

The interpretation of Rambam is corroborated by the opinion of Rabbi Naphtali Ben Asher Altschuler (late 16th and early 17th centuries):

> "I am surprised that Rashi and R. David Kimchi have not, with the Targum, applied the passage (Isaiah lii. 13—liii. 12) to the Messiah likewise." [10]

The following is from the pen of Rabbi Mosheh El-Sheikh, a contemporary of Rabbi Naphtali Ben Asher Altschuler:

> "I may remark, then, that our rabbis with one voice accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of the King-Messiah, and we shall ourselves also adhere to the same view." [11]

In spite of the teaching of the old synagogue, Rashi's interpretation of Isaiah liii became authoritative in Jewry. This departure from former commentators can be readily understood. Although mediaeval rabbis wrote lengthy penitential prayers, which are still read before and on the Day of Atonement, with the masses the consciousness of sin and of the need for salvation grew more and more faint. Then as a result of Judaism's polemic with the Christian church, the idea of an atoning Redeemer also became increasingly unwelcome.

An analysis of the passage is now in order. It is worthy of observation that the Hebrew text furnishes comparatively little cause for difference of opinion as to its content, since at the most but

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[10] Driver, S. R. and Neubauer, Ad., *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah according to the Jewish Interpreters*, p. 319.

[11] Idem, p. 258.

five words have been the subject of controversy. Therefore, the question is not: "What is the picture?" but rather: "Whose image does it bear?" Among the theories suggested in identifying the image the following five are noteworthy:

I. That the Servant of the Lord represents the people of Israel;
II. That He personifies the spiritual Israel;
III. That He is the ideal Israel;
IV. That He is a leper or a martyr;
V. That He is Jesus of Nazareth.

With regard to these theories it is to be observed:

A. The first, in considering the Servant as a personification of the Jewish nation, forces the following interpretations: Verses 1-6 refer to the Gentile nations; the death of the Servant symbolizes the exile, the end of Jewish national existence; and finally, the resurrection is a figurative prophecy of the restoration of Israel, to be followed by the conversion of the heathen. The insurmountable objection to this interpretation lies in the need for assuming that in verses 1-6 the Gentile nations are speaking. No Jewish prophet would have represented the heathen as exhibiting the attitude described in that passage. [12] Furthermore, in Isaiah xlix. 1-6 the prophet clearly teaches that the

[12] "A penitential psalm in the mouth of the heathen is altogether improbable; the literature of the Old Testament lacks analogous examples."

Gressman, Hugo, *Der Messias*, p. 307, Göttinger, 1929.

Servant is entrusted with a mission to both Israel and the nations. This definitely bars the possibility of considering them identical.

B. The second view, that the Servant means the spiritual element of the Jewish nation, also encounters certain obstacles. It may be said that the spiritual Israelites suffered most in the exile and also that they endeavored to bring the nation to repentance and to spread the knowledge of God among the Gentiles. They probably met with persecution at the hands of their own people during the exile. But it is hard to believe there was in the exile so great a difference between the mass and the spiritual remnant as to account for the language. While they felt the national calamity to be traceable to the sin of the people, there is nothing to justify the view that they were the special object of the divine wrath. Of the Servant it is said that "*he poured out his soul unto death*" and that he would rise again, but the spiritual Israel did not die in captivity.

C. The third view, that the Servant personifies the ideal Israel, existing at present only in the mind and purpose of God and becoming a reality only in the future, creates no less difficulty. Do lowly origin, mean appearance, and general repulsiveness characterize the ideal Israel? Can the ideal Israel suffer and die for the actual nation and rise again?

D. The fourth view, that the Servant is a leper or a martyr, is also untenable. No leper could have made the offering for sin so clearly

described in the passage; even the animals sacrificed in the Temple were without blemish. Finally, where in history is there a record of such a leper? Some have seen in the passage the portrayal of a martyr, as Isaiah or Jeremiah. But such a glorification of a pious man, even though he be a martyr, and particularly the idea that his death would result in blessing to the Gentile world, is in itself foreign to the Old Testament, where one would search in vain for a eulogy of even the greatest of Israel's heroes, whether it be Abraham, Joseph, Moses, or David.

E. The fifth theory, that the Servant is Jesus of Nazareth, can be substantiated by the following considerations:

1. The Servant is portrayed in features suggesting a human personality;

2. He is an innocent sufferer;

3. He is a voluntary sufferer;

4. He is a silent sufferer;

5. His suffering is vicarious, that is substitutionary;

6. His suffering is vindicative;

7. His suffering ends in death;

8. Death gives way to resurrection;

9. The resurrection inaugurates a new era in which the Suffering Servant is lifted from extreme humiliation to sublime exaltation. He attains a place of preeminence in world history, numbering countless followers, and through his work the plan

of the Lord in the redemption of mankind is realized.

Can it be said that these characteristics mark Israel, whether the historic or the ideal?

1. Could Israel have been personified in a picture which is without any hint of its allegorical character?

Scripture knows of no parallel case where personification is maintained throughout a whole section without intimation of the figure, but presents distinct hints in any allegorical passage. Even so liberal a scholar as B. Duhm says:

> "The Servant of Yahveh is here treated more individualistically than in other songs, and the interpretation of his person as referring to the real or the "true" Israel is here absurd." [13]

2. Was Israel as a nation an innocent sufferer?

The words in verse 8: "*Because of the transgression of my people was he stricken*", make the application to Israel as the Servant untenable, since "my people" clearly indicates Israel, and if the Servant be the actual nation, how can he be stricken for Israel? In Isaiah i. 2-9, the prophet speaks of Israel as a "*sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers*", while in Chapter xlii. he states that Israel's affliction is God's judgment for the nation's sins.

3. Was Israel a voluntary sufferer?

Never did the Jews voluntarily go into cap-

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[13] *Das Buch Jesaia,* Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament, p. 393.

tivity; each exile was the result of a humiliating national defeat.

4. Was Israel a silent unresisting sufferer?

George Adam Smith has well observed that silent suffering is an idea entirely strange to the Old Testament, where it is repeatedly recorded that the sufferers complained and challenged God in doubt. No sooner was Israel released from Egyptian bondage, than it rebelled against privation in the wilderness. [14] Even such personalities as David, Jeremiah, and Elijah succumbed to the temptation of complaining bitterly against their lot. The subjugation of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A. D. was one of the most stubbornly contested sieges in all human history. At various times the Jews revolted against their Libyan, Roman, Alexandrian, Persian, and Moslem oppressors.

5. Has Israel suffered for other nations?

Nowhere in the Old Testament or in rabbinical literature is an affirmation of this idea to be found. However, the idea of substitutionary suffering has a prominent place in the chapter, being expressed no less than seven times:

"But he was pierced because of our transgressions,
He was crushed because of our iniquities . . . .
And the Lord hath made to meet upon him the
iniquity of us all . . . .
Because of the transgression of my people was
he stricken . . . .

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[14] Exodus xvii. 3; Numbers xi. 1; Deuteronomy i. 27.

When his life shall make a trespass-offering . . . .
And their iniquities he shall bear . . . .
And he bare the sin of many."
(Vss. 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12.)

6. Were the sufferings of Israel of a vindicatory nature, bringing redemption to the world?

Scripture nowhere teaches that Israel will be redeemed by its own suffering, far less that it will redeem other nations. Nor does it indicate that a few righteous individuals will redeem Israel. [15]

7. Have the sufferings of Israel ended in death?

Whether the historic or the ideal Israel be considered, the answer is assuredly negative. Some see the exile portrayed by the figure of death, but this is inadequate, since the exile acted in a contrary manner, as a purifying force, strengthening the monotheistic belief of the Jews and their zeal for God. The Jewish people present a striking exception to the usual course of national development and decline. Every nation that played its role contemporaneously with Israel on the stage of Old Testament history has long since passed into oblivion. But the survival of the Jews is unique, defying fundamental laws observed in the history of nations. In spite of exile, dispersion, attempts at forcible assimilation, persecution, — in spite of liberation and toleration, often more disintegrating than persecution, Israel still maintains its racial identity.

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[15] Cf. Ezekiel xiv. 14 ff.

8. Has Israel experienced a resurrection?

Since neither the ideal nor the historic Israel died, there was naturally no resurrection.

9. Has the humiliation of Israel resulted in glorification?

Even if death could be taken as a figure for the exile, the restoration thereafter did not lift Israel from extreme humiliation to sublime exaltation. Neither did Israel win many followers among the nations. It must be noted that the missionary zeal of the Jews died out in the early years of the Christian era, when they no longer took an interest in winning converts among the Gentiles. For Israel to fit into the prophetic picture of a state of preeminence " . . . *he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high . . . because of him kings shall shut their mouths . . .* " three things must be true:

a. Israel must have made a conscious voluntary atonement, bearing the sin of many, — an atonement accepted by men as well as by God;

b. As a result of this atonement, "*because he poured out his soul unto death,*" Israel must have attained a leading spiritual position in the world;

c. Israel must be interceding for her oppressors.

Not one of the three is true of Israel, either the ideal or the real.

A study of the text in the light of other Servant-passages is now in place. While it is true

that in some of these Israel is called the Servant, [16] this relationship to God was interrupted when the nation became unfaithful. [17] As von Orelli says, the idea "Servant of the Lord", originally identified with the nation Israel, in transcending its former national limitations, became associated with the person and office of the Messiah, who was entrusted with the mission in which Israel so ignominiously failed. In a number of passages [18] the application of "Servant of the Lord" to the actual Israel is untenable as in them the Servant is distinguished from Israel in having a mission to fulfill, — to gather Israel and to be a light to the world.

In weighing these aspects of the chapter, the conclusion is inescapable that the obstacles to the Jewish or the so-called rationalistic interpretation of Isaiah liii are insurmountable, while the Suffering Servant presents a perfect picture of Christ against which no objections can reasonably be sustained. Only as we recognize in the awe-inspiring delineation the features of Christ do the blurring contradictions vanish away. **It is a striking fact that the synagogue readings from the prophets always omit the passage from Isaiah lii. 13 through liii. although the portions immediately preceding and following are read.** Has the Fifty-third Chapter become the "bad conscience of the synagogue", because it would rather not face so

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[16] Isaiah xli. 8-9; xliv. 1-2; xlv. 4; xlviii. 20; xlix. 3.

[17] Isaiah xlii. 18-20.

[18] Isaiah xlii. 1-4; xlix. 5-6; l. 4-9.

crystalline a picture of the atoning Redeemer it has denied?

When doubt as to the identity of the Servant of the Lord gives way to certainty, there still remain to be considered the *implications of His atonement.* Among the Jews the idea of vicarious suffering was a familiar one, since it underlay their entire sacrificial system, which taught that God could make no compromise with sin, but must punish it by its merited recompense, death. But since God is merciful, He has instituted a means whereby sin may be atoned for through sacrifice, without violation of righteousness. While the legal sacrifices of the Mosaic code were of no intrinsic efficacy, they symbolized the substitution of the righteous Servant of the Lord in place of the sinner. Some scholars take issue with the atonement on moral grounds, but the principle of the individual's bearing the guilt of the community has no connotation of injustice, since the divine judgment on sin is *willingly accepted and endured by the blameless Servant of the Lord.* Although some may find the idea of one suffering for others abhorrent, there is no moral impropriety when love steps in voluntarily to suffer ınd to save the sinner from the just consequence of transgression, as there is no moral impropriety when the creditor remits a debt and thus himself becomes the loser. Since the forgiveness of sin involves righteousness as well as mercy, it is only in righteousness that God can forgive, for were He to pardon out of compassion, or because a sovereign being may do as he wills, He would remove the very foundation

on which the human conscience rests. But in vicarious atonement God's compassion is manifested and the sinner is pardoned, and yet, in consistence with the rectitude of the divine government, sin is punished.

Moreover, not only does the atonement appear to be the only righteous means of dealing with the problem of sin, but also the only efficacious one, since only after awful suffering and death does the Man of Sorrows become the authoritative teacher and redeemer of mankind. The passage indicates that the Servant's suffering resulted in fruit greater than any mere teaching could produce, since it is only this vicarious atonement which makes it possible for God to forgive man's sin. Thus the atonement is seen to be a moral necessity in the program of human redemption.

But does not God forgive sin because of repentance alone? The Old Testament warrants no such belief. Rabbinic Judaism recognizes sins which cannot be expiated by penitence. These are transgressions for which the Mosaic law prescribes capital punishment, in the words of Scripture: " . . . *that soul shall be cut off from Israel.*" [19] Here the sole efficacy of repentance and of the Day of Atonement is that of suspension of the sentence. According to rabbinic literature, the sin of profanation of the name of Heaven (God) is atoned for to the extent of one-third by repentance and the Day of Atonement, one-third

[19] Exodus xii. 15.

by bodily suffering during the remainder of the year, while *nothing less than death can accomplish the final expiation.*[20] The tradition of the School of Ishmael teaches that sins are expiated by suffering: "*Chastisements wipe out all a man's wickedness.*"[21] According to another tradition the efficacy of suffering is even greater than that of sacrifice, for the former is personal, while the latter concerns man's property.[22]

More than this, Judaism teaches that the suffering and death of the righteous effect atonement also for others. In the Fourth Book of Maccabees there is recorded a prayer of the martyr Eleazar:

> "Thou knowest, O God, that when I might be saved, I am dying in fiery tortures on account of thy law. Be gracious to thy people, being satisfied with our punishment in their behalf. *Make my blood a sacrifice for their purification,* and take my life as a substitute for theirs."[23]

In conclusion the author thus affirms the idea of substitutionary suffering:

> "These, therefore, being sanctified for God's sake, were honored not only with this honor,[24] but also in that for their sake the enemies did not have power over the nation, and the tyrant was punished, and the fatherland purified, they

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[20] *Tos. Yom Hakippurim* v. 6-8; *Yoma* lxxxvi. a. Bacher, *Tannaiten*, i. 258. Isaiah xxii. 14.

[21] *Berakot*, v. *a*, end; Cf. *Sifre Deut.* §32 (ed. Friedmann, f. 73b).

[22] *Sifre*, i. c.

[23] vi. 27-29.

[24] Heavenly rank near the throne of God.

having become, as it were, *a substitute, dying for the sin of the nation;* and through the blood of those godly men and their propitiatory death, divine Providence saved Israel, which was before in an ill plight." [25]

The prayer of Eleazar is impressive, but out of harmony with the Torah. A clear distinction must be made between the Mosaic doctrine of atonement and the rabbinical teaching, which gradually took form in later centuries. The Old Testament distinctly teaches that all men are sinners, incapable themselves of making any satisfaction for their sins, which is acceptable to a just God. *Neither penance, nor good works, nor physical death, even that of the martyr, can satisfy the perfect law of God, for "There is none that doeth good, no, not one"* (Ps. xiv. 3). Every transgression deserves the divine wrath and curse, in this world and in that to come. Physical death is a part of the punishment for sin; it has no atoning efficacy for a third, or a half, or indeed any part of man's sin. After death, predicted consequence of man's sin, comes the judgment. If all men have transgressed, and if no man can make atonement for his own sin, it follows that works of supererogation are impossible. When we have done all within our ability (and who of us can claim this?) we must confess that we are unprofitable servants, doing only what it was our duty to do.

The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, clearly teach that without the shedding of

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[25] xvii. 20-22.

blood there is no remission of sin. The Old Testament ritual of sacrifice was a type of that on Calvary. **The blood of the animals expiated sin only because it foreshadowed the vicarious sacrifice of the Messiah,** whose death on the cross provides the actual atonement typified by every sacrificial ritual and predicted by Isaiah, who declares in the Fifty-third Chapter *that the Messiah is to make or be an "asham", or trespass-offering.*

If the atonement be a moral necessity for mankind as a whole, it must be one for every member of the human race. Divine love has flung down a challenge, in the face of which neutrality is impossible, and more, — dangerous —as divine justice will hold each human soul accountable for an answer.

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